Cian Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700-1830: Classic Ground.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 233. £50. ISBN 9781137332172.

'Classic ground': a term originally used by Joseph Addison in his *A Letter from Italy* of 1701, assumed by Mary and Percy Shelley in 1817 to describe the Alps in their *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, and fittingly reiterated here, by Duffy, to introduce a new sublime paradigm. It is a phrase which represents the 'amalgamation of physical and imaginative geography' (12) – the notion that an individual's encounter with the ostensibly 'natural sublime' (10) is, in fact, predicated on a pre-existing or emergent 'range of culturally determined and topographically specific associations'. As such, it is a model which fundamentally challenges Kant's conception of the individual's 'disinterested' (8) engagement with the sublime. One's response to the sublimity of landscape was, according to Duffy's latest work, 'quintessentially *interested*' (8), whether seen through the lens of the financial and the commercial; the national, the colonial, the generally political – in terms of class, gender, race – or the locally significant; the scientific; the religious, philosophical or aesthetic. As Duffy succinctly phrases it, 'when it came to the encounter with "natural sublime", it mattered what you saw; it mattered who you were and where you were when you saw it; and it mattered why you were there looking at it in the first place' (8).

Duffy's aim is not to 'offer any kind of corrective reading of any given position within this genre of philosophical aesthetics' (12), but rather to widen and to challenge its interpretative horizons and limitations by generating 'new cultural histories of various species of the "natural sublime" during the eighteenth century and Romantic period' (13). With this in mind, Duffy definitely delivers. What follows his introduction is a stunningly artful tour of eighteenth-century poetry, prose, history and philosophy: one which traverses the heights of the alpine mountainside, scrambles back down to the dark craters of Italian volcanoes, thrusts us out toward the seemingly blank spaces of the Arctic and Antarctic – then pulls us toward those of the deserts of central and southern Africa – before, finally, making us stand still to consider what is above and beyond these earthly sites of enquiry: outer space, astronomy, as a final, different mode of engaging with the sublime.

The structure of *The Landscapes of the Sublime* is, in itself, impressive. Any attempt to offer a comprehensive introduction to a new model for understanding the sublime does, of course, face the difficult challenge of acknowledging and engaging with the wealth of scholarship that exists on the subject to date without allowing these to overshadow the matter at hand. Duffy, however, offers a thoughtful and lucid introduction to, and overview of, studies on the sublime hitherto – Burke emerges as the most obvious influence as the book progresses – before turning to his first case study: 'The Alps and the Poetics of Ascent' (28). Duffy's decision to start each chapter with a specific moment, writer, poem, extract, before launching into a wider consideration of the site in question proves highly effective throughout. In Chapter 1, our starting point, or figure, is Wordsworth – specifically, in Book VI of *The Prelude*, the moment at which he describes crossing the Simplon Pass. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Wordsworth wanders across nearly all of the classic grounds Duffy presents; even in Chapter Two on 'Vesuvius, Etna and the Poetics of Depth' (68) where the poet proves elusive, Duffy's claim that the spectacle of volcanic eruption is politicised in Romantic writings resonates with aspects of Wordsworth's verse (the 'volcanic force' of war 'upheaved / the ground' in *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*, for instance). Shelley, De Quincey and the now little-known Patrick Brydone are but three of the other writers compellingly considered.

It seems appropriate that a poetic individual dominates, given that – in light of the layers of cultural coding that, Duffy claims, cloak classic ground – one must reconceive and

relocate '"the sublime" within perceiving subjects rather than perceived objects' (25). Duffy posits that 'the sublime which the individual describes becomes implicated with their own persona through the act of description'; their presence in the landscape 'becomes part of the cultural associations which that landscape is in the process of acquiring' (25). For the sake of scope, as Duffy acknowledges, domestic tourism in places like North Wales, the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands is, unfortunately, not considered. A focus on local or national identity in relation to the notion of sublime subjectivity would, though – especially on the basis of his brief but engaging comments on Ossian and the 'mountain sublime' (59) – certainly constitute a worthwhile subsequent project for Duffy, to further probe, develop and elucidate the innovative insights of this one.

Katherine Fender
St John's College, University of Oxford